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Title and Abstract

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Abstract

Work integrated learning is an umbrella term that refers to the opportunities provided to university students to integrate knowledge of theory and practice as part of their degree program. As the role of students in higher education is evolving, panel members sought to develop an understanding of the role of students in the work integrated learning (WIL) space through exploring current literature on student voice. In this panel, we consider what has been reported about WIL in relation to student voice, how it has been represented, and how this has influenced practice. This exercise of mapping and chronicling the use of student voice in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning offers a critical examination of previous research and charts a course for future endeavors.

We undertook a systematic literature review for two different disciplines, one which represented an example of a professionally accredited undergraduate degree program (teacher education), and the other an example of a program with no professional accreditation (geographical sciences). Panel presenters include two university faculty from teacher educators, one from Canada and the other from the United States, and two geographers, one a lecturer in Northern Ireland and the other a post-doctoral fellow from the United States.

It is 10 years since Cook-Sather (2006b) argued that “‘student voice’, in its most profound and radical form, calls for a cultural shift that opens up spaces and minds not only to the sound but also to the presence and power of students” (p. 363). It would be difficult to argue that in the interim, thinking and practice have shifted sufficiently to radically redefine the role of students. How their ‘voice’ has been understood in practice has been shaped by particular configurations of different institutional contexts and associated cultures of teaching and learning (Holdsworth, 2000). However, for the most part ‘student voice’ has been integrated into educational change in terms of their evaluations of their higher education experiences. Feedback, input, and recommendations are solicited on an institutional basis in order to develop an evidence base that feeds into discussions and decisions taken around enhancement and change (Dunne & Zandstra, 2011). It is commonplace today for higher education institutions to formally draw students into these institutional decision-making processes, recognising not only the legitimacy of their perspectives and opinions, but also the importance of students having an active role in shaping educational practice (Holdsworth, 2000; Levin, 1994). More recently, however, research has emerged that queries how historically located structures and power relations mediate the ways in which ‘student voice’ is incorporated within these institutionally driven enhancement processes (Partridge & Sandover, 2010). It has been argued that offering students opportunities within the curriculum to become ‘apprentice researchers,’ investigating and reflecting on their own teaching and learning experience, has potential to improve further educational outcomes (Sandover, Partridge, Dunne, & Burkill, 2012).

Engaging with students as collaborative partners in pedagogic knowledge acquisition and professional development, it has been argued, reinforces the idea of students as central to inquiry into the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) (Cook-Sather, 2014; Felten, 2013; Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014) and offers the possibility of re-configuring ‘student voice’ as a more powerful source of agency and action (Kay, Dunne, & Hutchinson, 2010; Raelin, 2007).

To frame our understanding of student voice for this panel, we use Fielding’s (2004b) four-part typology:

- students as data source— “teacher commitment to pay attention to student voice speaking through the practical realities of work done and targets agreed” (p. 201)
- students as active respondents— “teacher willingness to move beyond the accumulation of passive data and a desire to hear what students have to say about their own experience in lessons and in school” (p. 201)
- students as co-researchers— “more of a partnership than the two previous modes and, whilst student and teacher roles are not equal, they are moving more strongly in an egalitarian direction” (p. 202)
- students as researchers— “partnership remains the dominant working motif, but here it is the voice of the student that comes to the fore and in a leadership or initiating [role], not just a responsive role” (p. 202)

In focusing on student voice, we sought to determine the role of students in WIL literature. Our initial review established that there is not yet a substantial body of research where students are engaged as co-researchers or researchers (Fielding, 2004b, p. 202) of their WIL experience. Educational research is often conducted on, not with, students (Cook-Sather, 2007; Fine, Torre, Burns, & Payne, 2007; Thiessen, 2007).

The teacher education literature demonstrated more clearly the use of student voice to inform WIL within curriculum design. However, the geographical sciences literature did include examples of student voice being incorporated within the design of collaborative community-based forms of WIL. A role for students as researchers, who lead research and initiate curriculum change into WIL, was noticeably absent in both disciplinary sets of literature. The lack of evidence of the inclusion of students in the design, conduct, and analysis of WIL provides an invitation for SoTL scholars to redefine the role of students in this space.

One exemplary study by Ku, Yuan-Tsang, and Liu (2009), however, provides an example of a student as researcher relationship that actively sought the inclusion of the ‘student voice.’ They asked students to reflect on

their experience and take a more holistic approach by interweaving their knowledge with a need to respond to the varied situations they faced when sent on rural placements. Students were encouraged to offer their opinions and influence decisions, and the approach empowered students to be active and critical participants in not only their own learning, but the social issues facing the rural community in which they were placed (Ku et al., 2009). This study provides evidence that students can meaningfully contribute as practitioners and researchers, and invites us to reconsider how we can involve our own students in the scholarship of WIL practice and research.